

Some Relevant Issues Now in Systematic Dispute

✓ It is natural for the complexity and uncertainties of choice in Vietnam to be reflected in disagreement over the prospects and merits of particular strategies. ~~But~~ before discussing individual options in detail, ^{something} more must be said about the state of controversy existing now ^{within} with the U.S. government, and which is highly likely to ^{not} ~~permit~~ ^{persist} will into the new Administration. ^{But} Current disagreement over realities and future prospects is, ^{not only} acute ~~such that~~ (there is not even agreement, ^{in many cases,} on many issues on the relevant range of uncertainty) ~~and~~ fundamental; ^(disagreement is systematic) And it is systematic, in the coherence of sets of opinions and of opinion-holders. ^{And a systematic cleavage} This would not emerge adequately just from a discussion of options one by one. ^{Its systematic nature}

There are, in fact, two principle, ^{ol, opposed} ~~approved~~ bodies of opinions, each ~~more or~~ less reflecting the same body of current data -- with its gaps, ambiguities, and contradictions -- but brings ⁱⁿ to it differences in experience, assumptions, ^{(perceptions of US interests,} and sense of relevance. ^{Differences of opinion which derive from the data} ~~(more, it seems, than differences over fundamental US interests).~~ ^{are in mind, but not} It is important for the President to be aware of this distinct cleavage in opinion, ^{The split in views} It runs through the evaluation of each option and affects perspectives on relevant U.S. aims and alternatives as well as likely outcomes. But differences between the two groups, ~~on~~ which will be referred to here ^{as} Group A and Group B ^e show up most clearly in their perceptions of current reality in Vietnam and of the prospects of the current military course.

One set of officials, ^(Group A) -- comprising the highest ^{elements} ~~limits~~ in JCS, MACV, AmEmbassy Saigon, some C/A analysts, and most high State officials -- believe:

1. Hanoi is negotiating currently from a sense of weakness and failure; ^{the} very presence in Paris is ^{the} strongest sign of this.
2. VC/NVA losses in 1968 have irreversibly weakened those forces; that plus

current U.S. deployments and operations forced the withdrawal of many NVA units.

3. DRV/VC "cannot stand" the continuation of 1968 loss rates, and cannot reduce them without leaving SVN.

5. ~~4~~ Both RVNAF and the GVN are strengthening rapidly, so much as to discourage DRV/VC hopes of ultimate political victory ~~if they can~~ ^{or of} and outlast ~~the~~ ^{if they can only} the U.S.

6. ^(HES) Hamlet Evaluation Survey statistics showing a new high ~~in~~ (hamlets rated "A," "B" or "C" = 73% of population) -- ^{indicate} received a genuinely high level and favorable trend of ⁱⁿ "population control" by the GVN; ~~further~~ ^{discouraging to the VC/NVA}

4. ~~6~~ VC/NVA forces can no longer carry out an effective offensive on the scale of Tet 1968; if they try, it will fizzle, further weakening them.

7. U.S. operations of current scale and type will lead to conditions amounting to US/^{GVN} victory: meaning ^{(throughout this paper),} the destruction or withdrawal of all NVA units in SVN, the ~~de~~struction, withdrawal or dissolution of all (or most) VC forces and apparatus, the permanent cessation of infiltration, and ^{the virtually} unchallenged sovereignty of a stable, non-Communist regime (essentially the current GVN: ^{(regarded by Group A as} radical reforms or broadening are not ^{essential} to victory), with no significant Communist political role except on an individual, "reconciled" basis. On ~~the~~ ^{the} time required ^{for} for VC or DRV to "crack," given present military programs, opinions ^{Group A} vary from almost immediately, to 18-24 months, to 3-5 years. ^{7.8} Military escalation would shorten ~~this time,~~ ^{(though} at higher cost.

^{all time needed to achieve victory} Group B -- including a minority at State, some C/A analysts, ~~and~~ ^{most of} most of ISA and Systems Analysis in the DOD and the U.S. Delegation in Paris -- rejects or questions all of the beliefs above. While agreeing that the VC/NVA are surely weaker and the GVN/RVNAF surely stronger to some (uncertain) extent

1. The DRV did not go to Paris from weakness or desperation. DRV motives are uncertain, but probably include a desire to undermine the GVN and GVN/US relations, and (more importantly) a judgment ^{that} it would be less costly to negotiate the US out of SVN -- in pursuit of ultimate communist victory -- than to continue fighting for another 3-7 years.

2. ^{There is} Little reason to believe NVA units were "forced" from SVN, or cannot return. Reasons for ^{the} move are uncertain, perhaps related to Paris negotiations or to future operations.

3. Though 1968 losses were severe (especially in ^{experience} leadership) ~~and experience~~, DRV/VC could "stand" to replace losses at that rate, or a much higher rate, indefinitely: certainly in physical manpower terms of ~~and~~ infiltration capability, and almost ^{as} certainly in terms of resolution. Anyway, VC/NVA ^{forces} can control this rate of attrition, without quitting SVN; ^{some} 80% of combat contacts have been at their tactical initiative (i.e., they chose to suffer high losses in 1968).

4. Fundamental improvement in RVNAF and GVN is ^{or} conjectional, and doubtful. Increase in VC ~~KIA~~ ^(its increased) by RVNAF reflects longer size and number of operations, ~~and~~ ^{KIA} but ~~mainly~~ ^{still more,} increased US ^{air} ~~arm~~ and artillery support. "Reform" in GVN so far represents mainly replacement of Ky's supporters by Thieu's. The GVN/RVNAF could not have high confidence of defeating the ^{VC} ~~NVA~~ if the U.S. were to leave within the next 2 years, even if the NVA left earlier.

5. In HES statistics, "C" hamlets must be regarded as "contested," ^{not} really "GVN-controlled." "A" and "B" hamlets comprise only 25% of rural population ^{little} (no change from Jan 1967). Thus, even by these indicators, 75% of rural population are ^{still} subject to considerable VC influence and presence.

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in large offensive, if willing to accept high (not fatal) losses themselves.

7. Victory -- as defined above -- is not ^{soon} attainable by ^{the} current military approach, ^{certainly} short of 4-5 years, and possibly (some would say probably, others almost certainly) not ever. *Not is it brought nearer by escalation.*

The body of data available in Washington will support to some extent either of these positions, and is inadequate to resolve any of these issues conclusively. Some uncertainties, ~~if not controversies~~, (e.g., short-run trends in pacification, RVNAF and GVN improvement) might, ^{in principle} be substantially reduced by ^{field investigation} disinterested, experienced observers in SVN; others (e.g., VC/NVA ^{overall} capabilities, ^{and intentions} Hanoi ^{designs} ^{about all the impact on hand of new strategies} intentions) could not. ~~The~~ discussion of the situation appended to ~~the~~ ^{this} paper elaborates on the beliefs, arguments and evidence cited above and suggests some tentative judgements, ^(generally along line of Group B views). But the purpose of outlining the two positions here is to provide a context for summary evaluations of the currently relevant options. ^{It so happens that} Beliefs on the matters above tend to occur, for a given individual, in the clusters which will simply be described as "Group A beliefs" or "Group B beliefs." But members of each group disagree, of course, on other relevant judgments, which leads to disagreements over preferred options. ^{In general,} (Though, Group A tends to favor Options 1 or 2, with the aim of victory, while Group B favors Options 4 through 8, with the aim of compromise settlement, better or worse, and US extrication. A few ⁱⁿ members ~~of~~ each group favor Option 3, with the aim of victory).

In the past, high-level ~~level~~ evaluations both in Saigon and Washington have commonly suffered from a strong optimistic bias. There are strong bureaucratic and psychological pressures toward this, and they can be assumed to be operating today (and next year); indeed, there are some familiar, unmistakable signs in current reporting and argument. But this consideration alone will not resolve all current uncertainties. Bias is ^(obviously) not ^{alone} on one side (though in our Vietnam experience, unhappily, it has been the optimists who have been most often most wrong).

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5.4. Both RVNAF and the GVN are strengthening rapidly, so much as to discourage DRV/VC hopes of ultimate political victory ~~if they can~~ ^{or at} and outlasting ~~the U.S.~~ ^{if they can only} the U.S.

6.5. Hamlet Evaluation Survey ^(HES) statistics showing a new high in ~~(hamlets rated "A," "B" or "C" = 73% of population)~~ ^{indicate} -- received a genuinely high level and favorable trend ⁱⁿ of "population control" by the GVN. ~~further discouraging to the VC/NVA~~ ^{further}

4.6. VC/NVA forces can no longer carry out an effective offensive on the scale of Tet 1968; if they try, it will fizzle, further weakening them.

7. U.S. operations of current scale and type will lead to conditions amounting to US/^{GVN} victory: meaning ^(throughout this paper) the destruction or withdrawal of all NVA units in SVN, the destruction, withdrawal or dissolution of all (or most) VC forces and apparatus, the permanent cessation of infiltration, and ^{the virtually} unchallenged sovereignty of a stable, non-Communist regime (essentially the current GVN: ^{(regarded by Group A as} radical reforms or broadening are not ^{essential} to victory), with no significant Communist political role except on an individual, "reconciled" basis. On ~~the~~ ^{the} time required ^{for} for VC or DRV to "crack" given present military programs, opinions ^{Group A} vary from almost immediately, to 18-24 months, to 3-5 years. ^{P. 8.} Military escalation would shorten ~~this time~~ ^{(though} ~~at~~ ^{at} higher cost.

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compared to 6 months ago, and ^{perhaps} ~~(more uncertainly)~~ compared to a year ago, ^{while} and U.S. deployments ^{are now} more effective, Group B believes:

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